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STATE OF WASHINGTON

June 20, 2019

The Honorable Elaine Chao  
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE  
Washington, DC 20590

**Re: BUILD 2019 – Washington Coast Freight Corridor, Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Separation Project**

Dear Secretary Chao,

I am writing to convey my strong support as a County Commissioner of Grays Harbor for the Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Separation Project application for the United States Department of Transportation's Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant.

US 12 is the principal transportation route through Aberdeen, Washington to the coastal communities on the Pacific Ocean and Olympic Peninsula. US 12 serves as the arterial roadway for citizens and businesses throughout the region. This portion of US 12 is also designated as a Critical Rural Freight Corridor as it provides vehicle freight access to and from the Port of Grays Harbor, a port that handled nearly 3 million metric tons of cargo last year, as well as the Westport Marina which ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation at 150 million pounds of seafood landed.

Currently, US 12 experiences frequent congestion which affects local residents, visitors to Grays Harbor, and commercial and freight operations of the Port of Grays Harbor and surrounding industries. The major contributor to the congestion are trains that block access into and out of Gateway Plaza, which is a high-traffic, regional commercial destination. While trains pass by the Gateway Plaza, all seven at-grade vehicular entrances are blocked. This creates a public safety hazard, as emergency vehicle access to Gateway Plaza is impossible, isolating hundreds of people from critical services. Because rail crossings are blocked, the traffic on US 12 backs up in both directions due to drivers waiting in the traffic lanes to access the Gateway Plaza.

The Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Separation project will provide rail-separated access between US 12 and the Gateway Plaza, the major commercial center in East Aberdeen. The project will improve highway traffic flow during peak times with the removal of a signalized intersection and the addition of a round-about while greatly improving multi-modal access to the

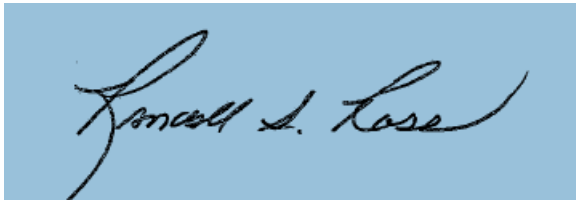
commercial area with the addition sidewalks and bike lanes that do not cross this five-lane highway and rail tracks. The Aberdeen US 12 Highway-Rail Separation Project is crucial for improving vehicle mobility, freight capacity, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and emergency access on US 12 through the bottleneck in East Aberdeen.

Our rural economy depends on continued growth in international shipments at the Port of Grays Harbor, job creation to support that growth, tourism generated by our coastal communities and access to the Olympic National Park. In addition, our local businesses need unimpeded access for customers and an efficient and competitive freight corridor. The improvements this project will generate will benefit community residents, tourists, local businesses, local and international freight, and most importantly, improve the public safety of this high traffic area.

Our community relies on the symbiotic relationship between our shipping, retail, and tourism industry. The grade separation project is critical in making sure we can continue to grow all those areas of business. It is also a critical safety issue for the Grays Harbor community when freight trains block access to the Gateway Plaza for ambulance and fire service.

To say this project is of regional significance is an understatement. As applications are evaluated, please carefully consider this project's merits and how it would accrue benefits to our region and all of those that travel through it for decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. The signature is cursive and reads "Randy S. Ross".

Randy Ross  
Grays Harbor County Commissioner, Dist. 2